

# Saint Paul Parks and Recreation's Canada Goose Press Release Kit

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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA, October 11, 2002

#### SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION TO BAN FEEDING OF WATERFOWL IN LOCAL PARKS

Canada Geese and other waterfowl flock to the shores of our urban lakes; attracted by lush, short grasses, open water and the promise of easy meals. Beginning this fall they may have to search a little farther for free food than in the past. Saint Paul is asking its residents to stop feeding waterfowl-for the health of the birds, the citizens and also the environment.

At Como Lake, an open car trunk in the parking lot of the east shore will attract dozens and often hundreds of geese and ducks. Neighbors of Lake Phalen on Saint Paul's east side attribute their large waterfowl population to the dozens of people who appear each day with bread and other goodies for the birds.

These people are likely not aware of the harm that artificial feeding can do to waterfowl, which feed naturally on small crustaceans, aquatic plants, and grasses. Studies have shown that highly processed foods can cause birds to die of a disease know as crop impaction and can cause digestive inhibition and ulcers.

The amount of food and territory available determines the number of wild geese in an area. Extra food sources, such as bread, crackers and popcorn, mean more birds are attracted to an area than can be naturally supported which can be detrimental to the birds.

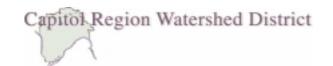
Dense concentrations can:

- Provide a natural disease vector, making it easier for illnesses to be transferred among birds.
- Create aggressive birds that attack other birds, small mammals and people.
- Can reduce reproductive success by competition within the flock

Dense concentrations of waterfowl also affect humans and our local environment.

- The goose and duck populations at Como Lake and Lake Phalen have caused significant soil compaction and erosion along stretches of shoreline, which is a direct factor of poor water quality.
- They also cause concentrated areas of bird droppings, containing nitrogen and phosphorus, which can lead to excessive plant and algae growth in water. This excessive growth can suffocate beneficial, aquatic plants and insects and lead to fish kills or foul odors.
- Accidental ingestion of droppings by humans and their pets becomes a greater concern in popular recreation areas where geese live.





Ramsey-Washington Metro

Willey Speck District



# EWS

The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department has been working closely with goose management and Water Resource partners to find the best solution to the waterfowl overpopulation problem. Many methods have been explored to reduce the numbers of waterfowl at Saint Paul's lakes without doing harm to the birds.

The method of vegetation management is a highly recommended control technique, because geese do not like being in vegetation above their heads. Current shoreland restoration efforts at Como and Phalen are using taller, native vegetation that will make these areas less attractive to waterfowl.

Hazing, flash tape and swan decoys also work, but their value decreases as the birds become desensitized.

Some neighboring cities have even hired a border collie to chase geese from golf courses and airports.

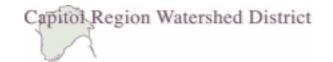
However, because territory size is directly related to the amount of food available, removing excess food sources through the use of a feeding ban, will force geese to naturally spread themselves over a larger area. In such areas they will find other food sources and will return to native foraging patterns.

Beginning this fall, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation will introduce a feeding ban on wildlife in its parks. Residents should expect to see no-feeding signs posted at popular feeding areas, shoreland areas planted with buffer strips (both for goose and erosion control) and information available at the City of St. Paul's website. www.stpaul.mn.us/depts/parks.

There are many other ways for humans in the cities to enjoy Canada geese and other wildlife in our parks while respecting their health. Watching geese and mallards through binoculars presents a greater learning opportunity to observe their natural behavior. It also allows us the chance to see one or more of the less familiar bird species that use the parks and lakes during migration. Check the website for informational bird watching dates.

Do your part to create a healthier, balanced wildlife population in Saint Paul's parks, and please do not feed the waterfowl.





Ramsey-Washington Metro

Willey field District



# **Results of Migratory Waterfowl Survey** March 2002 – June 2002

Beginning in March of 2002, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation staff surveyed the migratory and residential waterfowl along the shores of the four major lakes of Saint Paul, including: Lake Phalen, Como Lake, Pickerel Lake, and Crosby Lake. The objective of this survey was to record common as well as rare users of these water bodies. The following is a list of species sited at these lakes during the survey period.

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Lat</u>	<u>in l</u>	<u>Name</u>
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Canada Goose Branta canadensis Mallard Anas platyrhynchos Ring-Billed Gull Larus delawarensis Bufflehead Bucephala albeola Redhead Aythya americana Ring-Necked Duck Aythya collaris Common Merganser Mergus merganser Coot Fulica americana Scaup Aythya affinis Northern Shoveler Anas clypeata Blue-Winged Teal Anas discors Anas americana American Wigeon Wood Duck Aix sponsa Great Blue Heron Ardea herodias

Common Loon Galvia immer Pied Billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps

Great Egret Aedea alba

Hooded Merganser Lophodytes cucullatus **Double Crested Cormorant** Phalacrocorax auritus Ruddy Duck Oxyura jamaicensis Horned Grebe Podiceps auritus Eared Grebe Podiceps nigricollis Canvasback Aythya valisineria



Common Name: Canada Goose Scientific Name: *Branta canadensis* 

**Distribution:** Both resident and migrant populations of Canada Geese can be found in Minnesota. Subspecies can be found throughout North America. In 1954 the breeding population of Canada Geese in Minnesota was zero, currently there are over 180,000 breeding pairs and the populations are still growing.

**Habitat:** Canada Geese are often found in lakes, marshes, fields, golf courses, parks, ponds, reservoirs and other areas with high food supply and open water.

**Description:** Canada Geese have a black head, bill and neck and a white cheek patch. Their bodies range from gray to brown with white on the underside and black tail feathers. Geese can range in size from 6 to 13 pounds and are 22 to 48 inches long. Male and female geese are identical in appearance and have an average life span of 10 years.

Natural Diet: Geese in their natural habitats like to eat parts or all of the following plants: bermudagrass (Cynodon dactylon), rice cutgrass (Leersia oryzoides), smartweed (Polygonum Sp.), common barley (Hordeum vulgare), barnyardgrass (Echinochloa crus-galli), water knotweed (Polygonum amphibium), lanceleaf fogfruit (Phyla lanceolata). These are just the most common of the large variety of plant matter found in the stomach contents of geese. Under the water, geese slide their bills across the bottom silt, sifting it through their bill to sift out small worms, insects, snails and crustaceans like: threadworm (Strongyloides sp.), leeches (Nephelopsis sp.), aquatic sowbugs (Asellidae), caddisfly larva (Trichoptera), horse fly larva (Tabanidae), dragonfly nymphs (Anisoptera), mayfly nymphs (Baetidae), scuds (Talitridae) and crayfish. They also eat aquatic plants like eel grass (Zostera marina) and sago pondweed (Stuckenia pectinatus). Geese also eat the Red Fescue (Festuca rubra) and Kentucky Blue Grass (Poa pratensis) found in most lawns.

**Breeding:** At three years of age most birds will begin to nest. The female chooses the location for nesting and will build the nest without the male. Nesting sites may include islands, man-made structures, muskrat and beaver lodges, and shoreline edges. The female will incubate four to seven eggs while the male defends the territory, nest, and eggs from intruders. After approximately 28 days hatching occurs, generally in late April to June.

**Behavior:** Geese are territorial while nesting, with the male defending his territory from predators and other geese that may consume the resources (food) available close to the nest. Both parent geese do not like to stray to far from their nest to feed, thus, they defend what food sources may be close to the nest. Territory size depends on the amount of food available. The more food available, the smaller the territory the male will defend, creating a crowded nesting area. This territoriality ends as soon as the goslings hatch and move out into the water with their parents. Once the goslings have taken flight the family group tends to be nomadic, searching for the best food/safety sites. Hand feeding geese encourages them to stay in one area when they normally would have moved on. This again causes overpopulation that the habitat cannot support.



**Common Name:** Mallard **Scientific Name:** *Anas platyrhynchos* 



**Distribution:** Mallards are found in most of the northern hemisphere, only avoiding high arctic tundra and deserts.

**Habitat:** Very tolerant of human presence. Can be found in any wetland within its range as long as it is relatively shallow and provides some cover.

**Description:** Mallards are large ducks averaging 2 \_ to 3 pounds and 24-28 inches long. Males have a chestnut-colored chest, white belly, dark rump

and white tail. Head is a brilliant green and has a distinct white neck-ring. The bill is a greenish-yellow. Females are drab brown with a whitish tail. The bill is orange with black spots or blotches. Both males and females have dull to bright reddish-orange feet. Both also have a band of bluish-purple feathers bordered by white on their wings.

Natural Diet: Mallards are omnivorous (eating both plant and animal matter) and opportunistic. They feed in groups by dabbling, head dipping and upending in shallow waters. They sometimes feed on land and occasionally dive. The mallards diet consists of small crustaceans, aquatic plants and algae, mowed lawn grasses and assorted seeds and grains.

Behavior: Mallards pair up during the winter months before they travel back to their northern breeding grounds. Males defend their mates through the season. Males who are not paired up often band together and try to separate females from their mates. When they are successful, they breed with the female before she is able to get back to her mate. During non-breeding times mallards flock together and often can be found in groups of thousands.

**Breeding:** Mallards have complex courtship displays. A female initiates the male's display by following him while repeatedly flicking her bill back over the side of her body. The male then starts his head-up tail-up display where he stretches his head, wing tips, and tail upward then lowers them. This is meant to show the female what condition he is in. When observing mallards, notice the curls at the base of adult males' tails. These are attractants for females. Nests are usually made of reeds and grasses lined with down. There are approximately 8 to 10 eggs in a brood. Ducklings fledge at approximately 50 to 60 days.

**Adaptations:** The female's drab color allows her to hide from predators while sitting on eggs. Mallards migrate using the sun, stars, and magnetic fields to guide them. They are also able to use site identification for short movements.

# **Literature Cited**

- Clark, R. G., H. Greenwood, and L. G. Sugden, Influence of grain characteristics on optimal diet of field-feeding mallards.1986. J. Appl. Ecol. 23:763-771.
- Conover, M.R. and G.S. Kania. 1991. Characteristics of feeding sites used by urban-suburban flocks of Canada geese in Connecticut. Wildl. Soc. Bull. 19:36-38.
- Grandy, J.W. and J. Hadidian1997. Making Our Peace with Canada Geese. HSUS News Spring 1997, Humane Society of the U.S., Washington DC.
- Hanson, Harold C. 1997. The Giant Canada Goose. Illinois Natural History Survey. Southern Illinois University Press. p150.
- Hudleston, Deborah. June, 2001 Nutrient Loading into Como Lake, St. Paul Minnesota: the role of migratory Canada geese and residential fertilizer use. Unpublished Report. University of Minnesota, College of Biological Sciences. 1-25.

# For more information on the negative impact of feeding on Canada Geese, please use the following references:

Bill Bartodziej- Natural Resource Specialist

#### Ramsey Washington Metro Watershed District

(651) 704-2089

Bill can be reached to discuss watershed management issues related to Lake Phalen, and shore restoration techniques to reduce geese problems.

Sarah Bebus- Waterfowl Nursery Director

Mark Zens, DVM- Medical Director

#### Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota

612-624-7730

The WRC can be contacted to obtain physiologic information on waterfowl. WRC admits approximately 7,000 injured and orphaned animals per year, including many waterfowl. The waterfowl nursery typically admits 500-600 birds from 5 waterfowl species.

Patricia Freeman- Environmental Resource Specialist

#### City of Saint Paul, Division of Parks and Recreation

(651) 266-6363

Patricia can be contacted for information on Saint Paul's current nuisance waterfowl management practices and migratory and resident bird use of Saint Paul parkland.

#### Bryne Lueth- Urban Area Wildlife Manager

#### **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

(651) 296-6157

The MN DNR provides technical assistance and education pertaining to Canada geese in urban and rural settings. They also control the permitting process for goose removal programs statewide.

Brenda Hill-Wildlife Biologist

#### **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**

(920) 485-3007

The WI DNR provides technical assistance and education pertaining to Canada geese in urban and rural settings. Brenda Hill completed her Master's work on Canada Geese.

John Morarity- Natural Resource Specialist

#### Ramsey County, Division of Parks and Recreation

(651) 748-2500

Ramsey County Parks has been controlling Canada geese for last six years.

They use various techniques including goose roundups, vegetation

alterations, feeding bans and harassment with dogs and pyrotechnics.

Moriarty has been involved in urban goose management with various agencies for the last 12 years.

Tom Petersen- District Manager/Administrator

#### **Ramsey Soil and Water Conservation District**

Capital Region Watershed District

(651) 488-1476 (Ext. 11)

As a County-wide conservation agency, the Ramsey SWCD has a vested interest in natural resource stewardship. Feeding geese is hazardous to the species and the water resources it depends on.

# If you would like more information, please refer to the following websites:

"Managing agricultural foods for waterfowl" by Ringelman http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/wdb/pub/wmh/13\_4\_3.pdf

Citizens' Task Force on Canada Geese, Rockland County, New York. "Report on Humane Methods of Goose Control"

http://www.icu.com/geese/goosereport.pdf

"Managing problems caused by urban geese" by Gosser, Conover & Messmer. Berryman Institute Publication. Utah State University.

http://extension.usu.edu/publica/natrpubs/geese.pdf

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, "Landscaping your shoreline to make it less attractive for Canada Geese

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/livingwith\_wildlife/geese/landscaping.html

"Screening for the potential human pathogens in fecal material deposited by resident Canada geese on area of public utility" by Converse, Kathryn, Mark Wolocott, Douglas Docherty, and Rebecca Cole.

http://www.entm.purdue.edu/wildlife/newleaflet.htm

Santa Clara County Parks "Waterfowl Management Program" http://www.parkhere.org/prkpages/vasndch.htm

University of Minnesota Department of Fisheries and Wildlife- Canada Goose Web Page http://www.fw.umn.edu/research/goose/html/default.html